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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 001379

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SUBJECT: CZECH REPUBLIC: AMBASSADOR'S COURTESY CALL ON  
FORMER PRIME MINISTER AND CSSD CHIEF JIRI PAROUBEK

REF: PRAGUE 1356

Classified By: AMB RICHARD GRABER FOR REASONS 1.4 B + D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY During an October 30 courtesy call by Ambassador Graber, former Prime Minister and current Chairman of the Social Democrats (CSSD) Jiri Paroubek said U.S.-Czech ties were very good, "with the exception of a few minor issues, such as visas." Paroubek called himself "a friend of the U.S." Paroubek, still behaving very much like a man competing for public office, left the door open on talks about hosting a radar station as part of a ballistic missile defense system, and explained his preferences for ways out of the ongoing political stalemate - a grand coalition with his rivals the Civic Democrats (ODS), or a minority CSSD government that would rely, among others, on support from the Communist Party. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) The Ambassador's courtesy call came just after the second round of voting to the Senate, in which the center-right ODS scored a decided victory, winning a simple majority in the upper house. It was the ODS's third victory in a row, after the general election in June and local elections October 20-21 (Reftel). Some CSSD party elders are starting to grumble that Paroubek is to blame for the recent defeats by ODS. Paroubek, however, said he felt the Senate vote would have little impact on negotiations to form the next government. Paroubek predicted that President Klaus will choose somebody from ODS to lead the talks on forming the next government, though he cautioned that Klaus, "will not want to risk wasting another chance," hinting that somebody other than Topolanek might be the next Prime Minister. Paroubek stuck to his long standing position in favor of a grand coalition between ODS and CSSD, though ODS continues to reject this. Paroubek said that it had been impossible to speak of a grand coalition before the general and Senate elections, but that it should be openly discussed now. He pointed to the many ODS-CSSD coalitions being formed at the municipal level as evidence that there is no ideological reason the parties cannot share power. He said an ODS-CSSD government would be neither right-of-center nor left-of-center, but centrist.

¶3. (C) Paroubek said his alternative solution would be a minority CSSD government supported by several parties in parliament. He claimed he already has 103 votes in support of such a government, three more than needed to pass a vote of confidence. Paroubek raised the issue of Communists support for a potential CSSD minority government, acknowledging that such an arrangement was cause for concern in Washington. Paroubek emphasized that the Communist Party (KSCM) would not have any positions in the cabinet. Paroubek said CSSD has made it clear that any such arrangement would not include withdrawal from NATO, or withdrawal of Czech

troops deployed overseas. Paroubek pointed proudly to the assertion that under his administration, the foreign role of Czech troops had been strengthened. He also said that during his time as PM the left-wing faction within CSSD was kept under control.

¶4. (C) Paroubek said CSSD and KSCM still have "significantly different views on many issues - mainly related to foreign missions in Iraq and Afghanistan." He said he has made these deployments part of the package that KSCM must accept if it were to "cooperate with CSSD on the level of government." Paroubek added that, "frankly speaking, if they were to accept these and other reforms, KSCM would become like the Social Democrat party, something I don't see them doing in the near term." Paroubek confided that he would like to take away another 5% support from KSCM (currently enjoying roughly 13% popular support), leaving the party with a smaller "Stalinist core that nobody would want to deal with."

¶5. (C) On the question of early elections, which some in the media have said CSSD wishes to avoid, Paroubek sipped his green tea and responded, "the media have done all they can to destroy me. There is nothing more they could do. I've nothing to fear. My nerves are fine." Paroubek said CSSD is getting more than 30% support in polls, a level it has never before seen between elections. He stressed that he does NOT fear early elections.

¶6. (C) On missile defense, Paroubek complained that the USG had not done enough to involve him as Prime Minister in bilateral talks. He said that when he took over as Prime Minister in early 2005 he had no idea what missile defense was all about (note: talks with the Czechs had begun in 2002). Paroubek argued that he would have prepared a better

PRAGUE 00001379 002 OF 002

"marketing scheme" to influence public opinion had he been better informed by the U.S. side. He said the U.S. couldn't have planned it worse in the sense of timing, coinciding with the June general election, and then the fall Senate election. Paroubek said that not long ago former President Havel asked him why he was opposed to a missile defense facility. Paroubek said he explained to Havel that "if I agreed with hosting a base, CSSD would lose 3-5% of its support to KSCM." Paroubek stressed that the position he took as CSSD Chairman was different than the position he took as Prime Minister.

¶7. (C) The Ambassador asked Paroubek whether he recognizes a difference between a missile facility and a radar site. Paroubek said, without waiting for the question to be translated, "yes." Paroubek said he has been choosing his words carefully, to say "facility," or "station" instead of base. He said that even though opinion polls show 60% of the public opposes any kind of base, he feels a "radar station" can be pursued and is ready to discuss it further with U.S. officials.

¶8. (C) During the visit, Paroubek explained that the first post-communist leader of CSSD had been Jiri Horak. At the time Paroubek had been General Secretary of CSSD. Horak emigrated to the United States after the Communists took over in 1948, became an American citizen and eventually spent 40 years in America. Paroubek said that Horak's views on politics were strongly influenced by his four decades in the United States, and added that Horak's views strongly influenced his own. Paroubek said this was particularly the case when it came to opinion polls, which were for Horak, "more than a hobby." Paroubek admitted that he follows polls very closely.

¶9. (C) COMMENT. Paroubek made no mention of the plans for a caretaker government of experts, being openly pursued by several of the other political parties, as well as President Klaus. He also may be overestimating support for his own party, and is being somewhat disingenuous about his willingness to face early elections. He is facing criticism

from outsiders, and even from some within his own party, for CSSD's recent losses to ODS. But he is an aggressive politician with strong political skills and is likely to play an important role in Czech politics for the foreseeable future. Paroubek continues to demonstrate that he can pursue policies friendly to the United States, though he will do so with some reservations if those policies are seen as unpopular in the polls, or if those policies could cause his party to lose votes to the Communists. END COMMENT.  
GRABER